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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 004804

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: PARLIAMENT TAKES UP CONTROVERSIAL NSC REFORM

REF: ANKARA 4544

(U) Classified by Acting Political Counselor Nicholas S. Kass. Reason:1.5(b)(d)

1. (C) Summary: Parliament July 30 -- two days before the legislative recess -- began debating the AK Government's 7th EU reform-related package, which deals with in part controversial changes to the powerful National Security Council and the NSC Secretariat. The package may be voted late July 30. Most observers expect the package to pass muster, but we caution that it is not yet in the bag. End summary.

Press

2. (C) The most notable NSC-related features of the 34-article package include the following provisions: 1) the NSC SecGen will be assigned by the prime minister with the approval of the president; 2) the NSC shall meet every two months, or at the discretion of the prime minister or president; 3) making the NSC agenda and procedures/guidelines presumably less peremptory by removing the second sentence of Turkish constitution Art. 118 para. 3, which currently requires the cabinet to "evaluate decisions of the NSC concerning the measures it deems necessary for the preservation of the existence and independence of the State, the integrity and indivisibility of the country, and the peace and security of society."

3. (U) July 30 press coverage highlights a "harsh" de facto open letter from current (and outgoing) NSC SecGen Gen. Tuncer Kilinc, a noted hard-liner, to President Sezer and P.M. Erdogan claiming that the AK Government's plan to "civilianize" the NSC bureaucracy will "politicize" the national security policy formation process. "You will make the NSC dysfunctional" and undermine national security, Kilinc charged. The General also dismissed the notion of appointing a civilian to the head the NSC General Secretariat, even a senior ambassador; he pointedly suggested

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that Erdogan might as well assign a mid-level interior ministry bureaucrat (kaymakam) to the post. Kilinc also reportedly emphasized the necessity of protecting the current (military-dominated) NSC structure. Related reporting ties the letter to the upcoming meeting of the Supreme Military Council (YAS), at which Kilinc and others will presumably be retired.

Parliamentary Views

4. (C) Moments before heading to the floor for the debate, AK Yozgat M.P. Mehmet Erdemir told us that he is uncertain as to how the vote actually will go. He said that AK "is under major pressure" from unspecified quarters. On July 29, AK Erzurum M.P. Ibrahim Ozdogan offered to us privately that the reform package represents a positive development in redressing the civilian-military imbalance -- "you have to start somewhere," he said -- while emphasizing that the value of the package would be largely symbolic. Indeed, he asserted that by itself the reforms will do little to change the situation; he noted in particular that AK's plan to bring the military budget under civilian control has been essentially hamstrung by confining investigations to secret deliberations by the unelected Court of Accounts (Sayistay) rather than to direct, and more open, parliamentary oversight.

5. (C) In a separate private meeting with us July 30,

opposition CHP M.P. Halil Akyuz (Istanbul -- a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee) said his party will support the package as currently configured. CHP's primary objection, he said, is that AK continues to bring packages to the floor, thereby putting CHP in the politically awkward position of having to declare itself on AK's side repeatedly.

Selcuk's Legal/Political Analysis

16. (C) On July 29, Sami Selcuk, former President of the High Court of Appeals and a leading reformist voice, expressed to us sentiments similar to Ozdogan's: while sounding a positive note, he cautioned against expecting immediate, comprehensive change in civilian-military relations as a result of the current package. Selcuk linked the reform issue and the YAS meeting, noting that the YAS presented a major opportunity for Turkey -- if TGS Chief Ozkok, whom he described as more democratically-inclined than most of the other senior commanders, could succeed in putting a new stamp on the military leadership.

Comment

17. (C) The package on the floor has been somewhat diluted (reftel), which presumably would make it less controversial and easier to pass through Parliament. However, Erdemir's cautionary note is worth keeping in mind -- as is the fact that Kilinc's letter reportedly went not only to Erdogan but to a president: 1) interested in maintaining Establishment equities; and 2) habituated to blocking AK legislative and other changes.
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